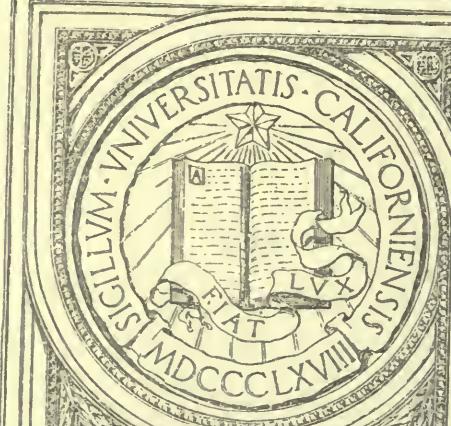


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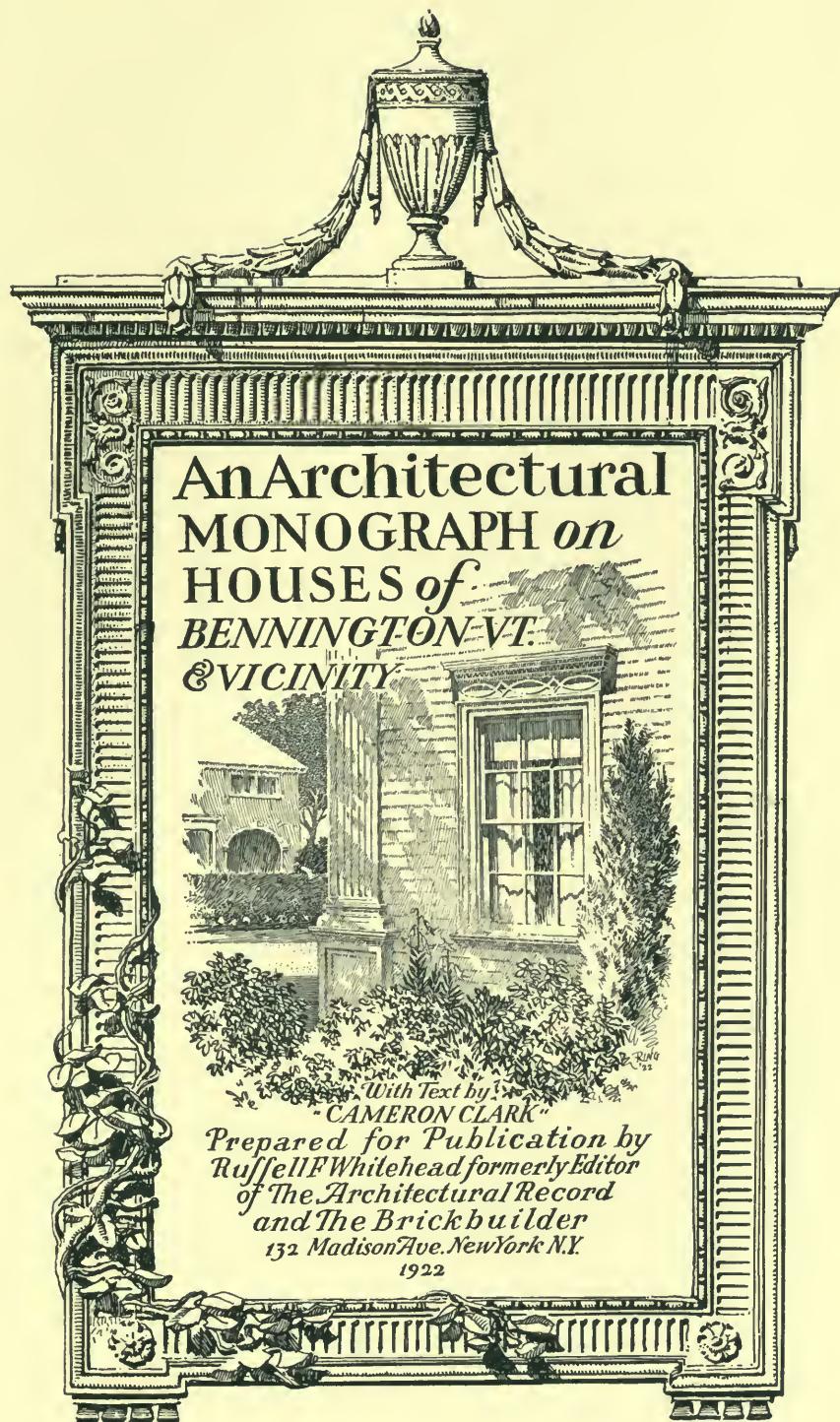
HOUSES OF
BENNINGTON VERMONT
AND VICINITY

With Introductory Text by
Cameron Clark



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THE GENERAL DAVID ROBINSON HOUSE, OLD BENNINGTON, VERMONT.

A unique adaptation of the Palladian window
used frequently in the vicinity of Bennington.

The WHITE PINE SERIES of ARCHITECTURAL MONOGRAPHS

A BI-MONTHLY PUBLICATION SUGGESTING THE
ARCHITECTURAL USES OF WHITE PINE AND ITS
AVAILABILITY TODAY AS A STRUCTURAL WOOD

VOL. VIII

OCTOBER, 1922

No. 5

HOUSES OF BENNINGTON, VERMONT, AND VICINITY

Used as a Study of Colonial Textures

By CAMERON CLARK

Although having spent several years traveling in Europe as a Rotch Scholar and as an Alumnus of the American Academy in Rome, Mr. Clark, of Clark & Arms, Architects, still retains a deep admiration for our Colonial architecture as the style for American homes.—EDITOR'S NOTE.

Photographs by KENNETH CLARK

We are continually reading more or less romantic tales of early Colonial life woven in and about houses with low-ceilinged rooms whose adze-hewn beams, dark with time and cavernous fireplaces, bring forth memories of a past filled with the simplicity of a cheerful hospitality. These descriptions, while adequate and true as to detail in recalling the past, seldom fail to include the time-worn bromide "They knew how to build in those days." So naturally one might be led to believe that here is the reason for the present revival of interest in Colonial architecture. But if this were true we would see at every hand replicas of this wonderful era, having true beamed ceilings and corner posts with braces projecting into the room. This is not the case, however, and it is not because of plumbing, wiring, or the other practical necessities of a modern house, but for the simple fact that the present-day builder asks for the Colonial style because of its exterior beauty rather than for any merits of good old-fashioned construction.

The secret of this desire for the Colonial has been the result of an unconscious appreciation of the color and texture as well as the form of these early houses. The motorist, passing through one of the quiet old villages with its ancient elms shading the beautiful old houses, cannot but retain delightful impressions of their simplicity and charm, and carry away with him a desire to recreate for himself something of that same potent quality which lingers in his mind.

The dark roofs with their huge old chimneys, the green shutters, hung against broad white clapboards, shingled or weather-beaten surfaces, as well as the perfect detail of the ornament used on old doorways, cornices, and porches, serve to create an impulse for better building and unconsciously cause a truer appreciation of the relative value of textures, color, and form.

While methods of construction are, to-day, slightly different, due to the change in conditions and in the variety of inventions, still the results may readily be, to all intents, identical. The material is always the same, though the near-by forest is changed to the near-by lumber-yard. The old beams, so readily felled, squared with an adze, and hoisted into place to bear the weight of construction, are substituted to-day by beams of a uniform size, sawed by mechanical means and of an adequate strength for the load they are to bear. And so on through the details of construction, for what we emphasize as accounting for the charm and permanency of old work can be as readily obtained to-day should we so desire. We need not necessarily follow the early methods, if the proper relation of values in the Colonial detail is understood and studied in the design. The early builders did their work in the simplest and most practical way possible to them—if we were to employ their methods we should have no better results than by using modern methods, and would only incur an unnecessary amount of labor and expense.

There are such a variety of details to be understood. Take, for example, the clapboards; their width or exposure to the weather is of vital importance, their edges may be rounded by many coats of paint, or possibly they may have little half round beading at the drip edge. What is their relation to the cornice boards, door and window frames? How do they meet the underside of the cornice and finish at the base? Are they surrounded by a plain or molded surface? What about the width of these clapboards? It is the finesse thus displayed by the early builder

took on a more studied and classical character, recalling in a thoroughly adequate manner the most perfect Georgian and Adam detail. As the early craftsmen designed they had always the actual structure in mind, a light here and a shadow there, the suitability of the detail they adapted, and they were not fooled as many of our modern designers have been by the sparkle achieved by lines crossed at the ends, inevitable axis lines and facile swerves of the pencil on paper. Modern American architecture has often been cursed because of clever draughtsmen who



THE HINSDALE HOUSE, NORTH BENNINGTON, VERMONT.

Another example of the use of the adapted Palladian window.

that causes us to exclaim as we approach and study his work. It is these things that combine to make his achievement pleasing.

As time went on the early builder developed more studied and elaborate detail; this, added to his already beautiful use of plain surfaces, served to enhance the proportion of his doors, windows, and cornices. The early examples were naturally quaint and rather archaic, with odd curves and shapes, and were only a step removed from the forms of the old world which they were trying to recall and emulate. Documents were gradually assembled and the designs

see only the paper in front of them rather than the structure beyond.

There are other weaknesses that our draughtsmen must overcome before we achieve that atmosphere of repose and respectability associated with the old houses. For instance the proneness to indulge in petty conceits, sprinkling them liberally over the design; working all of their pet motifs into the one before them. They should be more conservative and use possibly two in an effective manner, thereby adding visibly to the result and gaining a design of a more restful and pleasing character. Among the



THE HENRY HOUSE, NORTH BENNINGTON, VERMONT. Built in 1769.

little conceits referred to are the multitude of flower pot, singing bird, and new moon patterns that are cut in shutters, wrecking completely the exquisite, soft, velvety texture of the molded panel. Then, not infrequently, we see a recurrence of the fad of projecting the rafter ends to the underside of the cornice, and, still more, the exotic cut-outs on latticework, the overdoing of shutter fasts, hanging door lamps, queer ironwork, and patterned brick porches and steps, instead of the old, weathered, stone ones or soft, rich, thin bricks laid without mortar.

Bennington, Vermont, and the neighboring

Before entering into a discussion of the characteristics of the Vermont houses, there is one of a more unusual type which demands attention. This is the Henry house at North Bennington, built in 1769 (shown on page five). The porch, with its square columns, gives an atmosphere unique in houses of the north. Its proportions are generous, the roof lines simple, chimneys good, the detail, especially of the columns, slightly crude. Such little touches as the wooden benches and long slanting leader give an added quaintness. The clapboards are wide and the corner boards, as well as the corners of the



THE GOVERNOR GALUSHA HOUSE, SOUTH SHAFTSBURY, VERMONT.

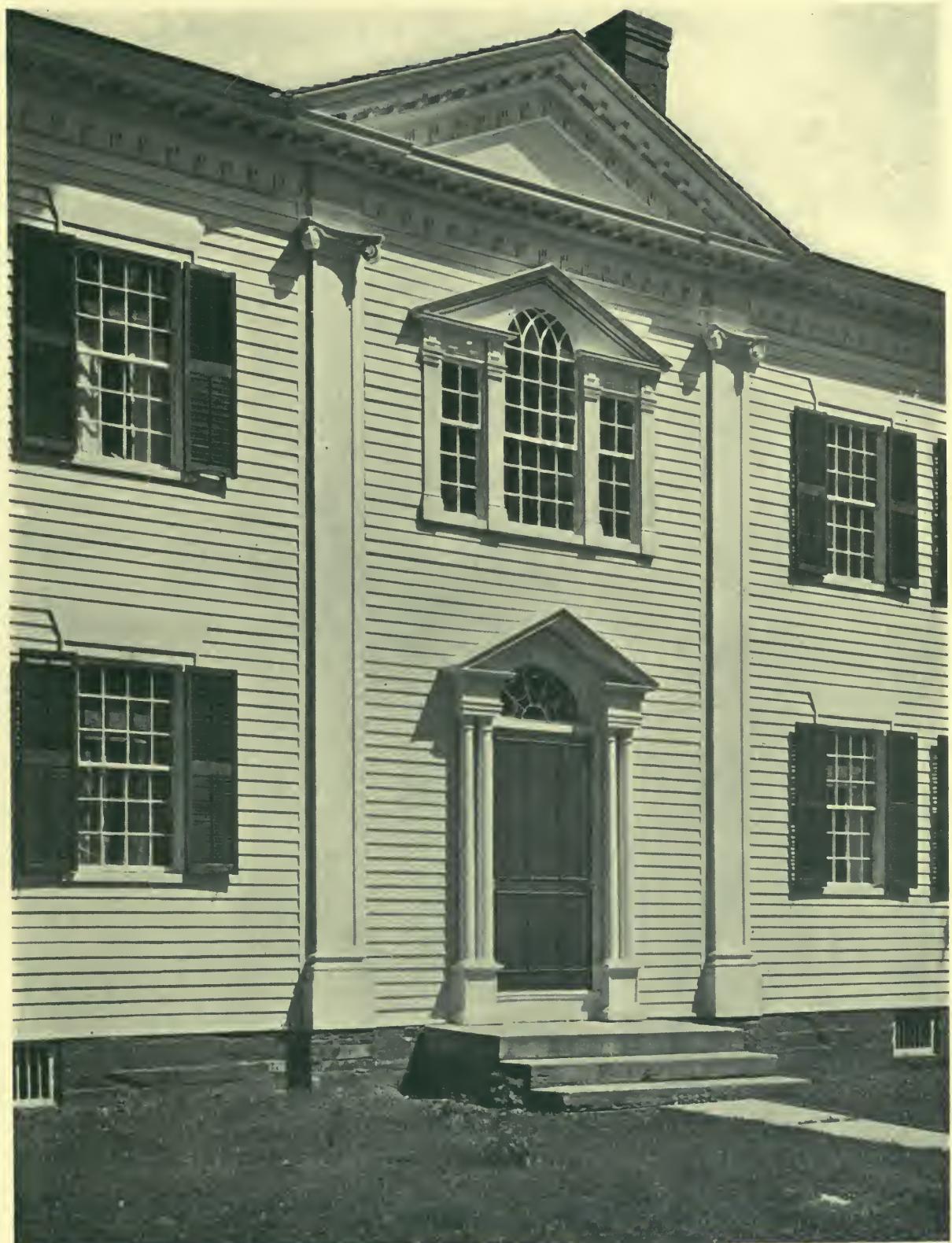
towns were on the edge, the frontier of colonization, while the sea-coast towns were quite the center of it. One does not find in these examples the perfection which might have been achieved if they had been in the center of a greater field of activity and experiment, yet several interesting motifs have been developed in Vermont, not to be found in other localities.

The type of house to be found near Bennington seems to be similar to that built in great numbers in the north Connecticut valley. It is narrow and rectangular in plan. Some are merely box-like structures, but well proportioned with excellent window and door openings.

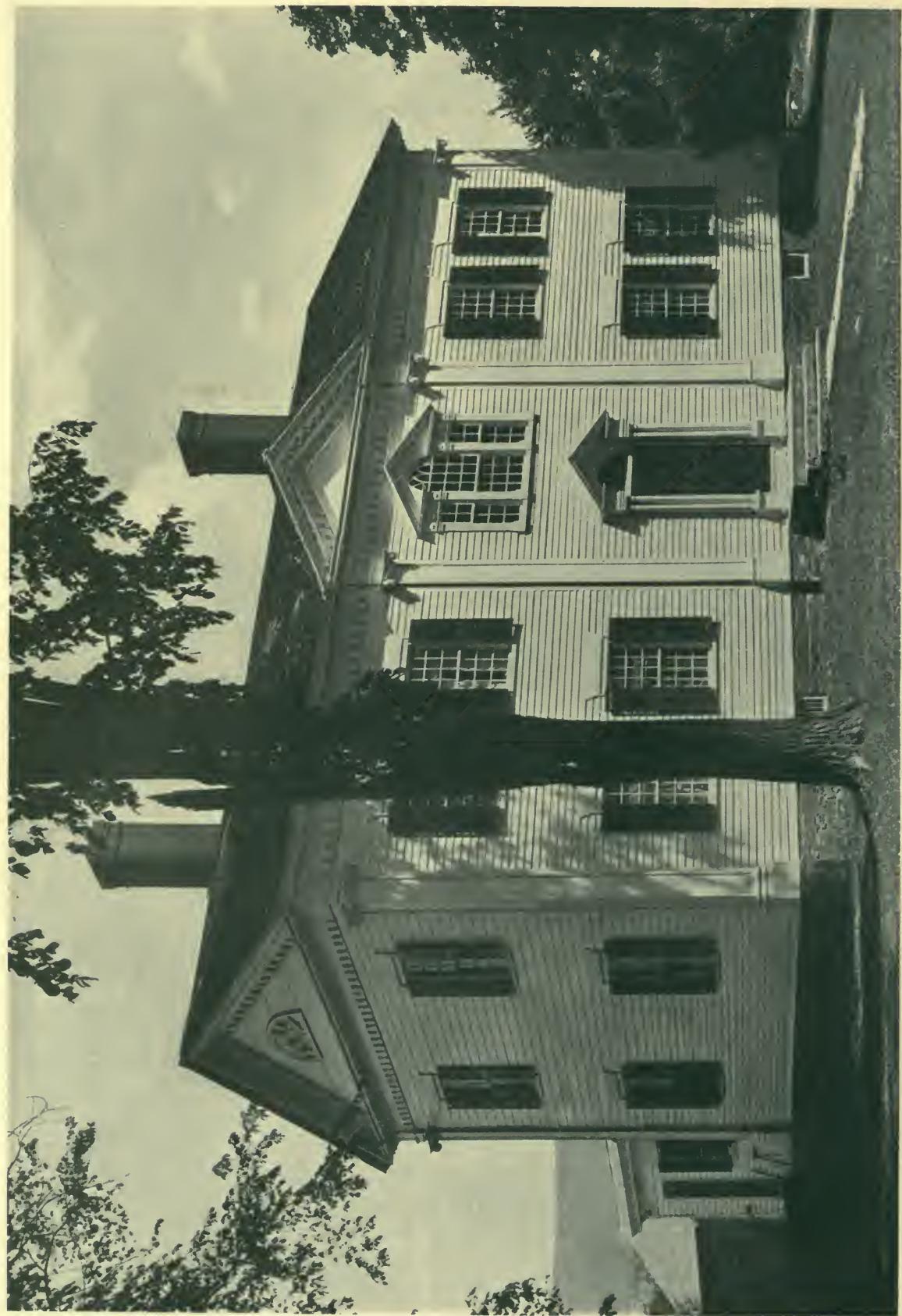
square columns, have beaded edges. Our modern work often forgets the edges, one of the little refinements which make us enthusiastic and pleased with the old. Analyzing the general scheme we find it a large proportion of gray in the clapboards, a dark space in the shade of the porch relieved by the white of the columns. The doors and windows with the accompanying deep-colored shutters are placed casually, giving an air of comfortable informality.

The Henry house, although of early date, has a more home-like and hospitable atmosphere than some of the later and more typical rectan-

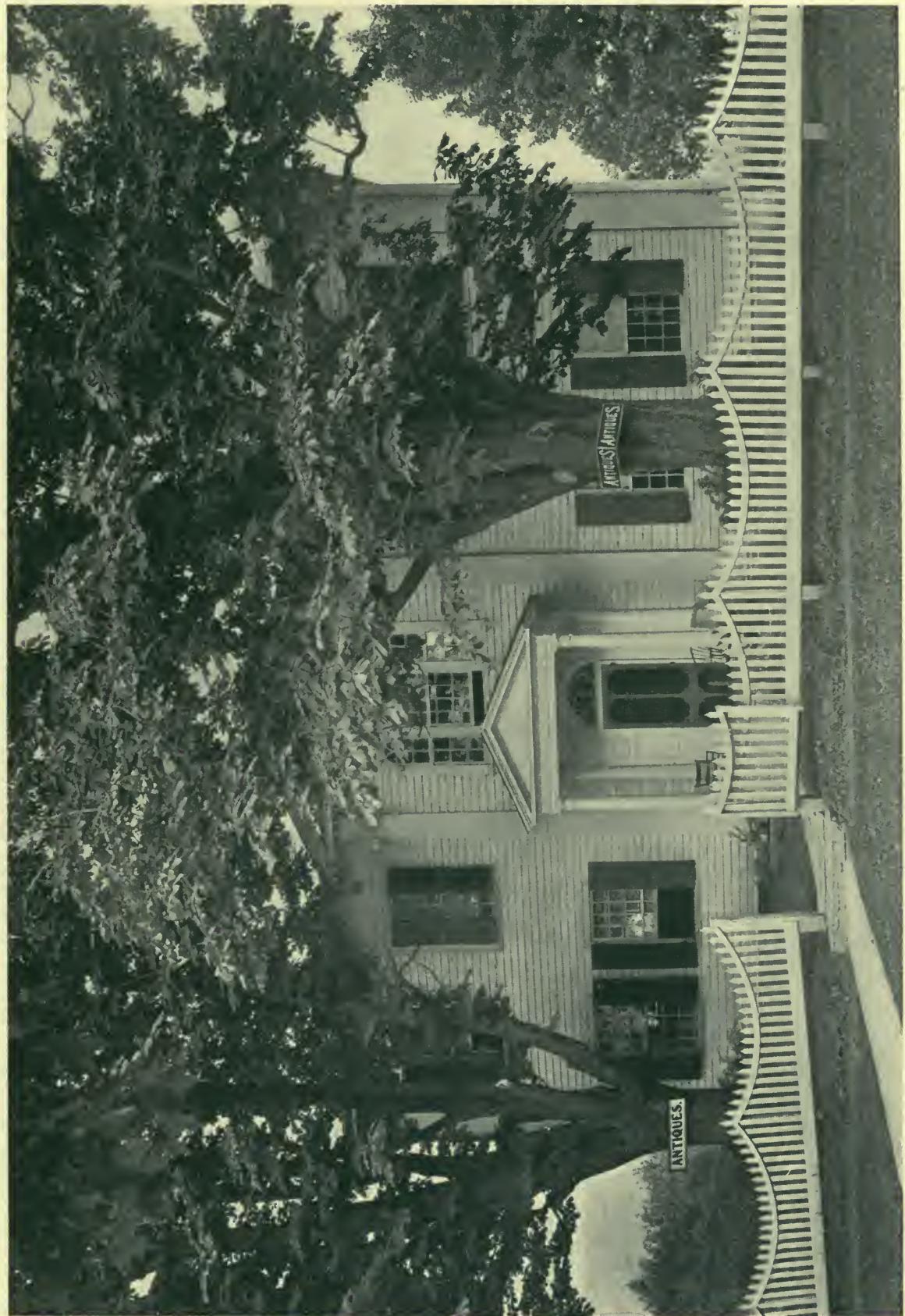
(Text continued on page ten)



THE HAWKINS HOUSE, SOUTH SHAFTSBURY, VERMONT.



THE HAWKINS HOUSE, SOUTH SHAFTSBURY, VERMONT.



THE GENERAL DAVID ROBINSON HOUSE, OLD BENNINGTON, VERMONT.

gular houses of this section. They were box like in shape, ornamented at the doors, windows, and cornice. The carpenter builders became more skilful as they created new structures from year to year, although several houses are very similar.

A detailed triple window has been used over front entrances several times. This form is adapted from the Palladian window and is the unusual feature of some of the houses illustrated in this Monograph. Instead of the entablature being placed above the pilasters the central semi-circular architrave rests directly on the caps. The remainder of the cap is taken up by the architrave of the smaller arches. The sills return around the plinth and have small molded brackets supporting the pilasters. Appearing as this motif does three times in the



Porch Detail.
THE GENERAL DAVID ROBINSON HOUSE,
OLD BENNINGTON, VERMONT.

houses illustrated, they must have been built by the same carpenter, or else this feature was one of the earliest stock details. The Colonial builders always had difficulty in placing such details as Palladian windows because they endeavored to build them into the usual plain front, without considering their relation to the windows on each side. They placed the meeting rail in an awkward manner, making unpleasant divisions of glass. This is an important point, since many good designs are spoiled because panes of different sizes are used throughout a house.

The Palladian window in the Hinsdale house has been regrettably changed by the removal of the original sash. It is not as much in character with the surrounding detail as is the one in the Governor Galusha house at South Shaftsbury,



HOUSE AT WEATHERSFIELD, VERMONT.

and yet it in turn is not as interesting as the remarkable window in the house of General David Robinson at Old Bennington. Realizing the weakness of this feature in the Governor Galusha house the carpenter builder applied pilasters to the main wall of the Robinson house, thereby separating it from the side windows and linking it with the entrance porch.

Studying these three houses, the Hinsdale house is consistent and good in scale, except for the aforementioned triple window. The rich gray clapboards, strengthened at the corners by

This is unfortunate, for you will find that the most satisfying designs are ones having uniform sizes of glass. The size of glass in the triple window is perfect, and it is regrettable that this size was not used over the entire house. The chimneys are not large enough to be consistent in design with the other details of the house.

The General David Robinson house has the most developed treatment of texture, the strong whites of the porch against the gray of the clapboards, pilasters, and wall, with the exquisitely divided sash softening the dark openings flanked



THE GALUSHA HOMESTEAD, SOUTH SHAFTSBURY, VERMONT.

the nicely proportioned quoins capped by the sturdy cornice with delicate dentil-like brackets and relieved by the very simple and rich architraves of the window, denote it as the work of a skilful designer. The door detail is quite in harmony.

Of the Governor Galusha house much might be said about the porch; well might we remember this example when designing for a client who demands a wide generous entrance. Unfortunately the main roof has not its generous spread. The cornice is good in itself but it lacks the feeling of support and the window-sash have been changed to panes of a larger glass size.

by shutters. The detail throughout is delightful in scale. This house is perhaps one of the most beautiful of the examples in this Monograph.

A house with a similar *partis* but weak in the duplication of pediments and stronger than the General Robinson house in the pilaster treatment is the Hawkins house at South Shaftsbury. Here, instead of stopping over the front, they carry around and become definite supporting corners to the design. The play of light and shade is masterly, the soft velvety whites of the pilaster, pediment, and window heads, the background of gray and the well-shaped dark openings make it perhaps the most balanced ex-

ample of texture, but lacking a predominant feature such as exists in the General Robinson house. The double columned entrance is seldom found, though it might have been more satisfying to have projected the columns farther and separated them slightly to give a deep shaded entrance.

The other two groups, with Palladian windows, with and without pilasters but possessing gable-ends, have combined motifs to make the General Robinson house. We then find a third

curved brackets, while the Norwich house repeats the window-frieze design very happily in the frieze of the main cornice. The door of this house is perhaps a bit small in size and too intimate in detail, although in itself a most beautiful bit.

As descendants show a likeness to their forebears with here and there a peculiar outcropping of curious characteristics, so in these homes there are the fortunate few having all the refinement of the examples inspiring their chief character-



THE SAYWOOD HOUSE, WOODSTOCK, VERMONT.

group of rectangular houses with very flat hip roofs, such as the house at Weathersfield, illustrated on page ten, still showing signs of its previous refinement, and the house at Norwich combining characteristics with the Governor Galusha house and the Hawkins house to give us the Leach house at Pawlett, illustrated on page sixteen. This may not have been what happened, but it was some similar series of events. In the first two Adam details have been used to ornament the frieze over the first-story windows, the Weathersfield house having a door rather common to this type and a boxy cornice with small

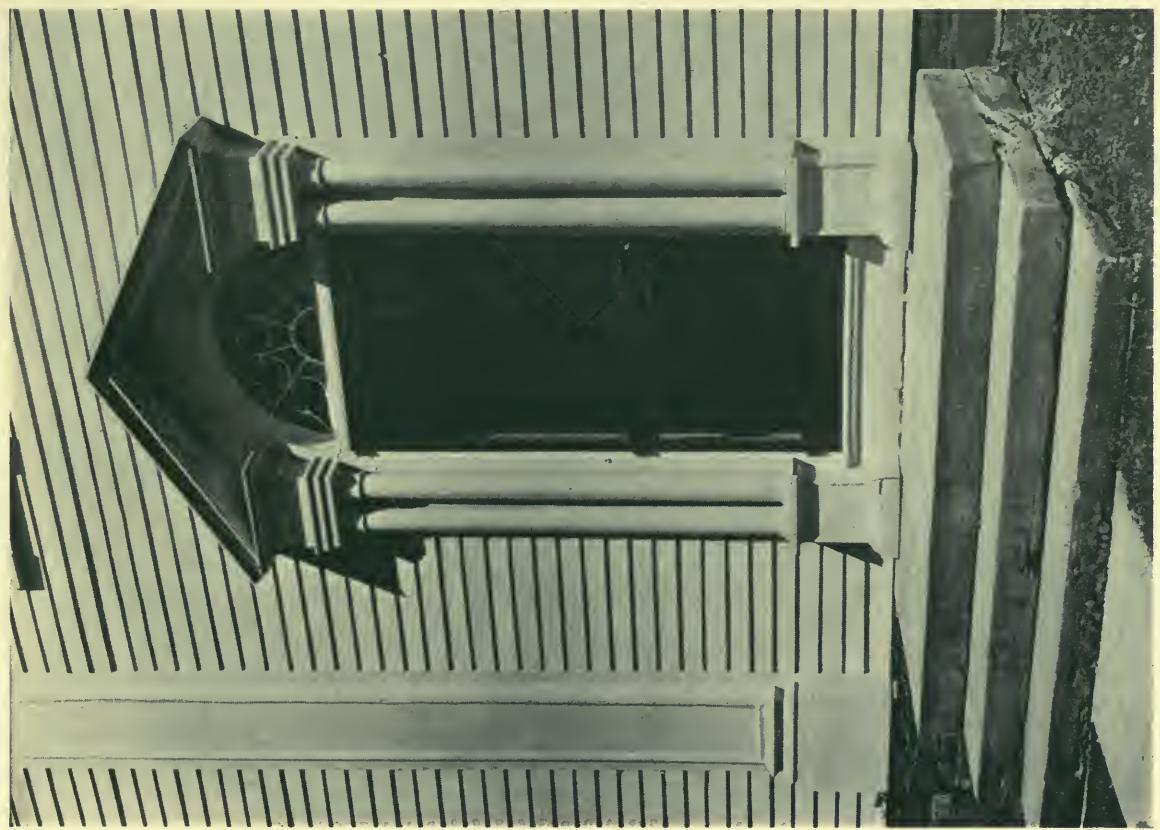
istics while occasionally one finds odd off shoots not wholly explainable. There is the long and narrow form represented by the Saywood house at Woodstock, Vermont, with a none too exciting door, while the large and cumbersome type includes the Kneeland house at Hartford, Vermont, illustrated on page fourteen. The example with the broad tendencies, placing all the interest toward the street, is shown in the illustration on page eleven of another Galusha homestead.

In writing for this Monograph an article dealing with texture and color, although the examples have been unusually interesting in themselves



THE KNEELAND HOUSE, HARTFORD.

TWO DOORWAYS IN VERMONT.



THE HAWKINS HOUSE, SOUTH SHAFTSBURY.

there has not been the variety quite necessary to illustrate fully the points in discussion. One would have to select from up and down the Atlantic coast to show the variety necessary.

We could start with the Saltonstall-Whipple house (illustrated in Volume I, Number 1, of the Monograph Series) and the house of Seven Gables in Massachusetts as examples of clapboard grays, the John Howard Payne and the Anna Halsey houses on Long Island (illustrated

grounds, wholly unequaled by any other type of Colonial architecture.

After running through this sequence of development and being analytically inclined one might separate the houses into groups, according to their texture and color values rather than to any peculiarities of plan and construction. The Whipple house might be taken as an example, studied carefully and then compared with the other Colonial houses. Could one possibly mis-



THE KNEELAND HOUSE, HARTFORD, VERMONT.

in Volume V, Number 2) as shingle grays, then a step forward to the clapboard grays with the beautiful divided double-hung sash of early Connecticut work, the addition of shutters and entrance details to the very height of skill in combining grays, whites, and darks as shown in the houses about Litchfield (illustrated in Volume V, Number 3), with an attempt at all white in the use of smooth matched siding in the W. H. Sanford house. The Litchfield types have a sparkle, set off by beautiful trees as back-

take it as coming later than the houses mentioned? It would be placed in the period of plain grays, then others in a period of grays and whites, and so on to the later periods of many contrasts and perfect details, with the last group the plain whites. The general effect of the early group is simple and unassuming, while the later is complex and distinguished.

The present-day architect is grasping some of the necessary information he must have either to approximate the old or adapt it as we have seen our predecessors do in the several groupings



ENTRANCE DETAIL—HOUSE AT NORWICH, VERMONT.

of the Bennington houses. The requirements of present-day home life complicate the composition, and it is only by application and persistence that the designer finally composes a sleeping-porch or persuades an owner that if he has divided upper sash he must have the same in

the lower sash. It will be a rocky road for any one who endeavors conscientiously to combine the many desires of the client and at the same time secure for him in the new house the qualities that he unconsciously had admired in the old ones.



THE LEACH HOUSE, PAWLETT, VERMONT.



HOUSE AT NORWICH, VERMONT.
Entrance Detail Shown on Page Fifteen.

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